



PROFESSIONAL READING

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Parshall, Jonathan and Tully, Anthony. *Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway*. Potomac Books, Inc., 22841 Quicksilver Dr., Dulles, VA 20166. 2005. \$35. 613 pp. Ill.

The Battle of Midway is seen as the pivotal naval engagement of the Pacific War, and more books have been written on it than any other WWII naval battle. Midway's four-day span has left it open to constant revision and reevaluation, and over the last 60 years many myths and historical interpretations of the battle have come to be seen as incorruptible fact. This heavily researched text, which offers a readable and highly detailed picture of Imperial Japanese Navy culture, provides a much-needed reassessment of the Battle of Midway.

The first chapters describe the Imperial Japanese Navy's determined, costly effort to forge a world-class carrier force. While the West could manage only a mediocre display, Japan was busy throughout the 1920s and 1930s building its navy, especially its carrier fleet. The description of that fleet's setting course for

Midway helps the reader understand Japanese overconfidence after six months of stampeding across the Pacific. Yet, there is uncertainty in the upper ranks. Many of the task force commanders and admirals are not aviators and also carry their own personal demons. These men, whom Western readers have come to regard as faceless icons, had many chinks in their personal armor. Throughout the book, the authors' pithy assessments of these personalities are of great value in understanding the overall events surrounding the Battle of Midway.

The authors lay out in intimate detail how Midway was at best only a place to lure the U.S. Navy carriers into a decisive battle. They also refine the long-held belief that the subsequent sortie into the Aleutian Islands was intended as a feint; instead, it was meant to gain the Japanese army's support for a landing and invasion of American soil. Also, postwar accounts by the Japanese categorically portrayed the Aleutian venture as a separate maneuver to be carried out simultaneously with the Midway operation, not as a simple diversion as had been

previously stated by Western writers. The mind-boggling complexity of the massive, two-pronged assault against Midway and the Aleutians, compounded by the added obstacles of the lack of interservice cooperation, was one of the reasons Midway became an American victory.

The authors reinforce the long-held belief that the Battle of the Coral Sea in early May 1942 was an important American victory that the Japanese neither fully comprehended nor incorporated into their planning for the Midway operation. The U.S. Navy was still a dangerous, unpredictable foe that required much more respect than the Japanese gave it at this early stage of the war. The authors demonstrate that Midway was lost as much to Japanese overconfidence and lack of detailed planning as to American SBD Dauntless crews diving at an opportune moment to strike crowded flight and hangar decks.

The chapters devoted to the actual battle are a treat, starting with an in-depth description of Japanese flight deck procedures and activities, something rarely detailed in Western publications. This new treatment is basically the Battle of Midway as seen through Japanese eyes. For several pages, the reader is shown IJN carrier deck crews and flight crews as they prepare for the battle. Japanese social and interpersonal foibles are presented as perhaps making the Japanese defeat almost inevitable. The lack of shipboard radar and adequate radios in the aircraft also played a large part in the Japanese inability to defend their fleet against incoming American bombers, thereby negating to an extent the technical superiority of IJN aircraft and torpedoes.

Facing page, Yorktown plane handlers converse with the crew of a Douglas SBD-3 from Enterprise's VB-6, which was damaged in the attack on Japanese carrier Kaga, on the afternoon of 4 June 1942. Below, two Nakajima B5N2 carrier attack planes from Hiryu seek to escape anti-aircraft fire between Yorktown and the heavy cruiser Pensacola later that day. (Photos courtesy of R. J. Cressman).

Photos of IJN carriers are hard to find, but the authors have put together an admirable collection. I would have liked to have seen more photography showing the aircraft involved as well as the flight crews, whose names have never been presented in such detail and amplification. Japanese sources are admittedly hard to engage, but the large amount of burning-ship photos could have been balanced with several views of aircraft and people. At any rate, maps, tables, ship elevations, and aircraft general arrangement drawings make up the remainder of a very good graphics package.

Copious end notes follow the main text, amplifying the intense main narrative. Other appendix topics include highly detailed rosters of the Japanese flight crews that fought against the American forces and attacked the U.S. garrison at Midway. Such information has never been presented in a Western publication.

Although this new book is heavy both physically and in content and is not for the casual reader, it is as important a work as any by Walter Lord, Gordon Prange, John Lundstrom, or Barrett Tillman. The authors are to be congratulated. Writing on a topic that might not at first seem to have anything new to be divulged, they have created something that is as fresh and vital as if it

were the first account written at war's end instead of more than 60 years later. I believe that *Shattered Sword* will become the preeminent narrative history of this crucial battle, and I consider it to be one of the most important books on WWII naval operations to be published in the last 20 years.

